

# Death and Judgment.

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## A S E R M O N,

ON  
HEBREWS ix. 27.

*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this  
the judgment.*



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**HEBREWS ix. 27.**

*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*

**I**T is recorded of Philip, King of Macedon, that he ordered one of his pages to come every morning to his chamber door, and cry aloud—"Philip, remember thou art mortal!" How much the conduct of this heathen prince shames numbers of people called christians, who, instead of keeping their mortality in mind, do all in their power to forget it. This discourse is intended to call your serious attention to what so much concerns you. Like Moses therefore we say, "O that you were wise, that you understood this, that you would consider your latter end!" May you be led to pray, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!"

Our first business at this time is with **DEATH**. There is something solemn in the very name! but, O, who can tell what death is? None of our relations or neighbours return from the grave to inform us; we must learn its nature, its cause, and its consequences from the faithful word of God. We may, indeed, see something of it in our dying friends. We may see the hasty progress of some fatal disease. The pains, the groans, the agonies of the dying, we have observed. We have seen many a man cut down in the midst of life: hearty, strong, and cheerful, one week; the next, a pale, cold, lifeless corpse, lying in his

his coffin, or carried to the church-yard. Others we have seen or heard of, cut off without a moment's warning; perfectly well one moment, the next in eternity. How true is the scripture—"All flesh is grass, and the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field; in the morning it flourisheth, in the evening it is cut down and withered." How frail is man! At "his best estate he is altogether vanity." He is crushed sooner than the moth.

What awful *separations* does death make! It removes us, at once, from our nearest relations, and dearest friends. We shut our eyes to all the world; "we shall see man no more in the land of the living." Death puts a sudden period to all our projects, good or bad; "in that very day our thoughts perish." It deprives the great of all their pomp and power; and the rich of all their possessions; for man "bringeth nothing with him into this world, and it is certain he can carry nothing out."

Death is *universal*. Other evils are partial. But all men die; "for what man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?" Death has reigned in all ages; and though, in early times, some men lived many hundreds of years, yet they all died at last. Death reigns in all countries: as certainly as the tide ebbs and flows, so "one generation passeth away, and another cometh." This is "the way of all flesh." The grave is "the house appointed for all living." "There is no discharge in this war." "We must needs die."

Death is in *itself* awful! The fear of death; the agonies of death; the ghastly appearance of the dead; the sad change that takes place in the body, which renders it offensive, and obliges us to bury it out of  
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our sight; the cold grave, the crawling worms, the fordid dust—all these are terrible things to nature. But what makes death a thousand times more terrible is, that it is *the effect of God's anger*. Had there been no sin, there had been no death. God, to keep Adam from sin, threatened him with death; but Satan, the father of lies, said he should not die. He ventured on the forbidden fruit, and so, by his sin, “death came into the world and hath passed upon all” his children in every succeeding age. Death, then, is “the wages of sin;” it carries with it the most awful marks of God's anger. This is justly called by St. Paul the *sting of death*: “the sting of death is sin.” It is the consciousness of guilt, and the just dread of future misery, which make death so very dreadful. Poor thoughtless mortals, neglecting to regard the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, which brings a sovereign remedy, are unwilling to think of it; they put off as much as possible the evil day: but did they know the love of Christ in dying to disarm death of its sting; did they consider, that, by faith in Jesus, all the danger of death may be avoided, they would sit down and look death in the face; and wisely consider, how they may meet, with safety and pleasure, what they can never avoid.

For let it be remembered, that the death of each of us, here present, is absolutely certain. Our text says, “*it is appointed* :” it is the firm decree of God, which cannot be reversed. It is the unalterable law of God, a law which no sinner can transgress; other laws of God are trampled under feet, but this *must* be obeyed. We know not *when*, nor *how* we shall die; but we are sure that we *must* die. Whether we are high or low; rich or poor; male or female; young or old;

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“it is appointed for us once to die.” Possibly, when death comes, we may be very unfit to die; very unwilling to die; but death will not delay on that account: ready or unready, when the hour comes, we must submit. It is said of the wicked—“he is *driven away* in his wickedness”—*suddenly* perhaps; at least *unexpectedly*. It was “when the rich fool” talked of many years to come, that God said to him, “this night shall thy soul be required of thee:” often *violently* dragged to the grave, like a malefactor to the gallows. O what would some great and rich sinners have given for a few weeks, or a few hours of life, if money could have bought them; but death will not be bribed: go the sinner must, “although the physician help, friends groan, the wife and children weep, and the man himself use his utmost endeavours to retain the spirit; his soul is required of him: yield he must, and go, where he shall never more see the light.”

Here let us stop a moment; and apply to ourselves what has already been said.

*Is life so short?* Then why should we waste it? Why should we make it shorter by our sin and folly? How much of our precious time is intirely lost! What shall we think of sports and pastimes, cards, and plays, and dancing, which are expressly intended to *kill time*?—To *kill time*! Shocking expression to the ears of a christian! O had you heard what some dying sinners have said of their murdered time, when time with them was nearly over, you would dread the thoughts of killing time; rather would you study how to “redeem time,” and obey the direction of the wise man, Eccl. ix. 10. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest.”

*Is death certain?* Will it surely come, and you know not how soon? Then let it be your first business to prepare for it. This is our Lord's advice; "Be ye also ready, for ye know not when the Son of man cometh." It is appointed unto men *once* to die, once only: now that which can be done but once, should be well done; especially as our eternal all depends upon it. As the tree falls so it lies; as death leaves us judgment finds us; if an error happens here, it can never be remedied. Surely then, it is the highest wisdom of man to be prepared for this great change.

Let us now proceed to the *second* part of this great subject, namely, *Eternal judgment*; "after death the judgment."

Immediately after death, it is presumed, the soul, separated from the body, appears before God; and by a private, particular, and personal judgment, receives the sentence of eternal life, or eternal death. The scripture abundantly shews, that the soul subsists in a separate state from the body. Our Lord promised the dying thief that he should be with him, on the very day of his death, in paradise; and St. Paul longed "to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord;" accounting it far better than the highest state of privilege or usefulness in the church.

But the accounts we have in the scripture of the judgment, refer to the *great day*, when the dead shall be raised from their graves, when small and great shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The glory and grandeur of this day will be far beyond the powers of language to express. "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised." "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, with his mighty angels." "The Son of man shall come

come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him ; then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory : and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats."

*Reason* itself must allow the necessity of a future judgment. At present, we often see the wicked prosper, while good men are much afflicted. How many murderers, oppressors, and persecutors, escape punishment. But it is inconsistent with the justice of God that it should always be so. "He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, when all men shall give an account of what they have done in the body, whether it be good or bad." Even now *conscience* testifies to the future judgment, by passing a private sentence on all our actions ; and summoning us to appear at the bar of God, to answer for them.

To shew how justly and righteously every thing will be done on that occasion, it is said, Rev. xx. 12. "The books were opened, and the dead were judged out of these things, which were written in the books, according to their works."

The book of the *law* will be opened. The commandments of God are the rule of men's actions ; and are any "of the works of the law?" Do they seek righteousness by their doings? Let them now appeal to the searcher of hearts, that they never broke this law, in thought, word, or deed, but loved and served God perfectly, without sin, all their lives ; then may they claim life by the law ; but this is impossible. No man living will be justified in this manner : but the law will for ever condemn all who have broken it, yet have neglected the great salvation revealed in

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The book of the *gospel*. In this blessed book "the law of faith" is revealed; it is declared, that he that believeth in Jesus shall be saved; and happy will it be for those who are found true believers; who, having known their ruined and helpless state by the law, have fled for refuge to the grace of the gospel, and believing in Jesus for righteousness, are "found in him."

Beside these, the book of God's *remembrance* will be opened. God, who knows all our actions, and all our secret thoughts, records them in his book. Nothing done by man, whether good or bad, is forgotten; for it is written, that "he will bring every secret thing into judgment," and "that for every idle word that men speak, they shall render an account."

Exactly agreeing with this, will be the book of *conscience*, which shall also be opened; or, in plainer words, every man shall stand convicted in his own conscience, that he is guilty of every charge brought against him by the law. At present, sinners take little notice of their sins; and if they feel a little remorse of conscience, soon forget it; but at the great day, they will all rush upon the memory. Conscience shall serve instead of a thousand witnesses; and, as the scripture speaks, "every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God."

But, blessed be God, there will be one more book opened, and that is, *the book of life*, containing a list of the names of all the people of God; even of those who were chosen by the Father to salvation, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and who were called, renewed, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Here will be found the names of all those people who were convinced of their sin and misery, humbled on account of their abominations, and who, being enlight-  
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ened in the knowledge of Christ, came to him by precious faith, for life and salvation; and who proved the truth of their faith by the holiness of their lives and conversation.

Now hear from the word of God what will be the sentences pronounced on the assembled world, at that awful period. When a poor criminal at the assizes is tried for his life, what a solemn moment is that, when silence being demanded by an officer of the court, every voice is hushed, and every eye is fixed on the judge! Each of us shall then become, not a spectator of another's trial, but, an expectant of our own sentence; that sentence which shall fix, beyond the possibility of an alteration, our happy, or our miserable doom.

Now, hearken! Matt. xxv. 34. "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink," &c. &c. Let us take care, my friends, to understand this aright; for many have sadly mistaken it. We are not to imagine, that such good works as are here mentioned, merit heaven; this is not only contrary to the whole gospel, but contrary also to the meaning of this place. You are to observe, that the judgment here represented, is of professors of the gospel: all the persons here spoken of, both at the right and left hand of Christ, are such as were called by his name, and professed to be believers in him; and when it is said they are judged according to their works, it means, according to the evidence of their works; that is, whether the faith they pretended to have, brought forth good works or not. The sentence

sentence passed is not *for their works*, nor *for their faith* neither. The kingdom they receive is not their *wages*, but their *inheritance*; not merited, as it were yesterday, but “prepared for them, before the foundation of the world;” and they were prepared for it, not by their works, but by the grace of God, which united them to Christ, led them to believe, and enabled them to bring forth the fruits here mentioned, namely, works of love to the saints; not mere works of humanity; but of love to the poor despised saints of God, because they belonged to Jesus. These happy persons you see had no proud thoughts of the merit of their actions, for they humbly cry, “Lord, when saw we thee hungry and gave thee meat,” &c.

But O how awful is the other sentence. “Then, shall he say unto them on the left hand, *Depart, ye cursed*, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels! O what a word is that—“*Depart.*” What! depart from Christ? Depart from the fountain of all happiness? It will be to the condemned sinner the most dreadful word that ever sounded in his ears: and yet, how dreadfully just! for it will be said to that sinner, who, in his heart, has said a thousand times to Christ, “Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways.”

This sentence will be pronounced against those professors of religion, whose pretended faith did not bring forth the fruits of love to the saints. Sins of *omission* only, are here mentioned; neglecting to help and relieve the poor and afflicted members of Christ. And if this will be ground of condemnation, what think you will be the lot of persecutors, who instead of feeding, clothing, and visiting the members of Christ, robbed them of their food, raiment, liberty, and life?

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What will be the portion of drunkards, swearers, whoremongers, sabbath-breakers, and the whole herd of profane and vicious sinners? Such, we are elsewhere assured, shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven, but must have their portion with devils and damned spirits.

### APPLICATION.

When St. Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled." Did a heathen judge tremble, and shall a christian be stupid and unaffected? "Behold he cometh with clouds! Every eye shall see him!" *Your* eyes shall see him. You have received the solemn summons this day. What will you do? If wise, you will act like Noah, "who being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, builded an ark to the saving of his house." If unwise, you will be like his infidel neighbours, who laughed him to scorn, and perished in the flood. If ever you would wish *then* to be numbered with the saints, now lay to heart the solemn truths you have heard. Retire a little from the bustle of the world, and from the company of the gay. Endeavour to realize the important scene. O think of the tremendous day, and the miserable state of poor Christless sinners. "Those who are then found Christless, will also be speechless, helpless, and hopeless. How will their hands hang down, and their knees knock together! O what pale faces, quivering lips, and fainting hearts! O dreadful day, when the earth shall be trembling, the stars falling, the trumpet sounding, the dead rising, the elements melting, and the world on fire!"

This scene, so tremendous to the sinner, will be the most happy and joyful that was ever known, to  
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the humble believer in Jesus. The second coming of Christ is spoken of in scripture as a most desirable event; and true christians are described as "loving his appearance," and saying, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." And would you not wish to call this great and glorious Judge your friend, and to be owned by him at the great day? Well then, know, my friends, that he is now set before you in the gospel, as an all-sufficient and most gracious Saviour. He is now as gracious as he will then be glorious. Why should you keep at a distance from him? His blood can cleanse you from all your past sins, though deeply dyed, as scarlet and as crimson. He came to seek and save such sinners as you. Look then to him and be saved. Come but to him, he will not cast you out. Believe in him, and he will be your friend. Your first business in religion is to fly to the Saviour's arms, and find salvation in his blood. He will then give you his Holy Spirit to soften your heart, subdue your iniquities, and enable you to bring forth those works of love, which he will graciously own and reward in the great day.

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Let the thoughts of "appointed death and judgment," be duly improved by the believer. What watchfulness, what seriousness, becomes us! Let us be concerned to be always ready; daily walking humbly and closely with God: sitting loose to all created objects, from which death may so suddenly separate us; and having our affections set on heavenly things, to which death will so readily transmit us. Look on death as a disarmed foe; a serpent which may hiss, but cannot sting. Look on judgment as a most desirable event; when soul and body being united, and made perfect in holiness, shall be openly acknowledged, and for ever made happy in the full enjoyment of Christ to all eternity.